

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

The Role of International Education in the Struggle Against Terrorism

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[Real Audio of Briefing](#)

MR. DENIG: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the Washington Foreign Press Center. And welcome, also, to journalists in our New York Foreign Press Center.

We are very pleased to be able to welcome to our podium this afternoon Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs Patricia Harrison, who has also been acting these last several months as our most senior official for public diplomacy in the Department of State. She is here to brief us today on the topic, "The Role of International Education in the Struggle Against Terrorism."

Secretary Harrison will have a few opening remarks to make, and after that, will be very glad to take your questions.

Secretary Harrison.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HARRISON: Thank you, Paul.

Good afternoon, members of the press, ladies and gentlemen. Before I begin, I'd like to introduce my colleagues -- if they could just identify themselves -- raise your hand: Tom Farrell, a Deputy Assistant Secretary for Academic Programs; Rick Ruth, Director, Partnerships for Learning and Director of the Office of Policy and Evaluation; and Travis Horel, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Professional Exchanges; and Stuart Patt, PAO, Consular Affairs.

Well, I don't know if you know this, but International Education Week has just ended, and in this fourth year of global education programs, which involve teachers and students and leaders from business, industry and government worldwide, we are affirming that among people of goodwill, education is a common value. And these events took place from Africa to the Americas, Europe, Eurasia, East Asia, the Pacific, Middle East and North Africa, and men and women highlighting a critical need providing young people, the successor generation, with the educational tools they need to become contributors to society -- builders of communities.

And if, as one young man in Thailand said, that terror is our common enemy, it's also true that international education is a common value and a positive tool against terrorism. My Bureau, Educational and Cultural Affairs, relies on 80,000 volunteers. We work with 1,500 public-private partnerships to conduct 35,000 professional, academic and cultural exchanges a year; and we now have over 700,000 alumni of our programs representing over 140 countries. And I know you probably all know the statistics: we have cabinet members, and people like Hamid Karzai and the late Anwar Sadat and others who have really taken the exchange process to a very senior level. But even those who are not household names -- Americans and others -- return to their countries, and when they return home, at a minimum, they share these experiences with their family, their friends and their colleagues. And over time, they will touch the lives of over 7 million people. And why is this important? This is where the power of the exchange process lies, because they break down stereotypes, they increase mutual understanding and respect between the people of the United States and other countries.

Right after September 11, 2001, I was sworn in by Secretary Powell, and of course, my focus was certainly to move beyond that



terrible day in a way that would do honor to those who had died. And I'll never forget -- there was a Fulbrighter -- a young man from Syria, Muhammed Al-Khalil -- and he was studying at the University of Arizona, and the press interviewed him. And he said that he believed that international educational exchange programs were the answer to global terrorism; and I believe this as well.

That's one of the reasons we are reaching out more, not less, and -- excuse me -- reaching out to younger populations, reaching out beyond our traditional elites. We've got to begin this process of mutual respect and understanding at much earlier ages.

And that's why I felt it so important that I began International Education Week, actually, in Hawaii, through the East-West Center, on whose Board I serve, acting for the Secretary of State, and they had invited 300 school children from all over Hawaii to participate in the program. So many different ethnicities -- and when I looked out at that room: Asian and African-American, and Hawaiian -- just to name a few -- and I asked them, "If you've ever known a person from another country, would you please raise your hands," and almost 300 hands were raised.

They were working on a project on how different countries celebrate thanks, Thanksgiving. And at this beginning of our Thanksgiving and of Eid al-Fitr, it was a particularly poignant example of how they're already connecting these young people to a world beyond Hawaii's geographic borders.

And at the same time that I was talking to them, at the very same time, there was a video conference in Egypt between an Egyptian elementary school and an American school, and so many of these international events worldwide. Why is that important? All of this is going on at a time when headlines are focused on terrorist acts. And these programs, our programs, underscore that these young people, with help from, and guidance from teachers and their communities, are preparing to ensure very different headlines to define their futures.

Two years ago, right after September 11th, I went to Marrakech to attend a conference on higher education in the Arab world. And I was so inspired by the remarks of Queen Rania of Jordan, that I threw away my prepared remarks. And she talked about the "hope gap", and I know you're familiar with that. That's the divide among the young people who are underemployed and undereducated in the region and have no hope for the future, and really are susceptible to the siren song of radical extremists, and the other group -- the group we see on these exchange programs who've had guidance, who have help, who really believe that they have a future in which they can contribute.

And that's why, with the help from my colleagues in the State Department and in the Bureau, we launched a program called "Partnerships for Learning." It's a global initiative, and it's based on the premise that people of good will, whatever their background, the religious faith, their ethnicity, want only the best for their children, and that best starts with an education.

Fast forward two years later. I'm really happy to report to you that "P for L," as we call it, "Partnerships for Learning," in partnership with our counterparts in so many other countries, has enabled us to reach out to the all-important successor generation.

Our first "P for L" youth exchange has begun with a 131 high school students: Nigeria, Tunisia, Lebanon, Jordan, the West Bank and Gaza, Egypt, Kuwait, Syria, Yemen, Turkey, Pakistan and Indonesia. In the second year, this, what we call, "the YES program," will expand to Morocco, the United Arab Emirates, Afghanistan, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Algeria and Bangladesh; and all told, we will fund over a 1,000 students in under two years. And there are undergraduate programs and school linkage programs and teaching training programs as well.

We will be holding the first Partnerships for Learning Conference in Istanbul early next year. And let me tell you how I ended International Education Week. I met with a group of young Fulbright foreign language teaching assistants from Turkey, Morocco and Asia. And when I announced that the Partnerships for Learning Istanbul Conference was going to be held in early '04, they cheered -- because these young people are truly, in a very significant way, part of the fight against terrorism, against these destroyers who do nothing to build societies, who destroy the lives and dreams of so many young people.

One young Fulbrighter at that meeting, a woman from Morocco, she said, "I am a Muslim. I am not a terrorist. It hurts me that these people say they are representing my religion," and she was almost killed in the Casablanca bombing. Another young Fulbrighter, a young man from Turkey, has still not heard if his friends back home are safe, and he urged us to go forward with our program in Istanbul; and we will.

We're also going to send to the Turkish people these letters from American school children and from our exchange participants -- and we don't have time for me to read all of them -- but let me just take one. "We know how you feel." And this is signed from the kids of America. "We care for you." And it says, "We know how you feel. We had the same thing happen to us in New York. It was very, very, very sad. My mom had a friend who died, and I looked up at her and she was crying. I felt very bad for her. To the kids in Turkey, from the kids in America, sorry. Hope you feel better." And it goes on and on. And letters from our partners to

the Ambassador -- this one is from Lincoln, Nebraska, the Mayor's committee -- we have hundreds of these and they are so very, very important.

The first letter is important because even at this young age, the writer understands that people of good will everywhere, whatever their religion or race, can be a target of terrorists. But through our programs, I am confident that we are going to prevail. As the President said, "...to ensure the rule of law, civil societies, and the non-negotiable demands of human dignity." Whether it is in Afghanistan, where we are training teachers, and we just reestablished the Fulbright program, or in Iraq where, again, we just reestablished the Fulbright program, and also will be bringing the Iraq National Symphony to Washington, D.C., to perform with our National Symphony, or in Turkey, through Partnership for Learning, or wherever that "hope gap" exists.

Secretary Powell said, "As we work to end the scourge of terrorism, let us also work in partnership to increase peace, prosperity and democracy." He also said, "International education, learning about other cultures and languages through study, living overseas, interacting with people of other countries, promotes the free exchange of ideas, allows us to seek joint solutions to problems, and helps create lasting partnerships to meet our shared concerns."

And that is what the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs is doing: promoting these long-term, and what I think are very sustainable, partnerships. And now I'll open up the floor to questions.

MR. DENIG: As usual, I'll ask you to use the microphone and identify yourself and your news organization.

Let's start with the gentleman in the back from Sudan.

QUESTION: El Bashir from Sudan. The seven countries on the list of terrorism, in my opinion, should be on the top of your list. Are you allowing the economic sanctions and political differences stop you from reaching out to them? Are you following any aggressive and creative approaches to build bridges with the governments?

Thank you.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HARRISON: Thank you. Through our Partnerships for Learning Conference, we are inviting ministers of education from many countries. And the whole point to your question, in terms of an aggressive approach, and what happened in Marrakech, which I would like to underscore, is that I posed the question at that conference to all of these people, "Are you willing, now, to focus on your young people, as we focus on our young people?"

This is the future, and we can say that we can't go forward until (a) is resolved or (b) is resolved. And in the meantime, an entire generation will grow up without the tools they need to become, really, contributors to each of our societies." And I have to tell you, the overwhelming answer was yes -- and we're getting remarkable response. And that is what this conference in Istanbul is going to be about.

I am so saddened -- and heartsick -- about what happened in Istanbul to the Turkish people. But we are not going to be turned around. We are going to be supporting them. We are going to have our conference, and we are going to reach out -- I would like to say rather than in an aggressive way, in a very affirmative way.

I think we've come to a point in world history where more people than ever before are looking at their own young people and realizing that we each have to take responsibility for ensuring their future.

QUESTION: May I have a follow-up? My question was about what does the State Department, or what the State Department is doing to overcome these sanctions and say, "Okay, sanctions -- this is political and all that. Now we are working on something else," and reach out to these governments?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HARRISON: Which governments, specifically?

QUESTION: I mean the seven governments -- Sudan, Iraq -- Iraq now is no more; and the others, other countries, the seven countries on the list.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HARRISON: Yes. Well, in terms of the economic sanctions, that is on one level. When people comply and show that they are people of good will, that's when the exchange can happen.

I have to tell you that I just traveled to Iraq a few weeks ago with two of the people who are here with me today. And if you're interested in hearing about their regard in terms of the sanctions, what they are so pleased about is that we are restarting their connection to the West.

They have said -- a group of women have told us, "We've been living in an insane asylum. Please don't leave." The university

professors -- we met with all of them from Baghdad universities -- told us what their needs are and helped us develop the re-launch of Fulbright. We are able to work with people when they, in good faith, can work with us.

MR. DENIG: All right. Let's take the gentleman from Africa there.

QUESTION: It's not a question. I just want to corroborate --

MR. DENIG: Could you introduce yourself, please?

QUESTION: I just want to corroborate what you have said because I'm a Fulbright alumnus --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HARRISON: Oh, you are?

QUESTION: -- and I would like to express my appreciation to the State Department for what it has done for we alumni from different parts of the world.

This year we are more than 136, I think, from different part of the world, even from Arab countries, so who have got a scholarship, and I think it's a very good thing. So I just want to express my appreciation and just tell everybody that what you have said is just true.

So there's no discrimination. So people from all across the world from different culture have been brought to the United States so -- to promote cultural understanding, cultural dialogue, which I think is vital for world development. I would like to express my appreciation to the State Department for that.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HARRISON: Well, I'm going to thank you in advance because, according to the statistics, you are going to be contributing at so many different levels -- that's what Fulbrighters do. And we have Deputy Assistant Secretary Tom Farrell, who runs our Fulbright program, here today, and one of the things we want to make sure is we reach out through Fulbright to more diverse populations so that people who ordinarily -- I grew up in Brooklyn, New York, and nobody ever talked to me about a Fulbright Program.

And by not acknowledging that there are groups out there of young people who may not have the economic wherewithal, or they may be in some other area where the schools aren't so good, but they have the brains to compete and to get a Fulbright, we're trying to take Fulbright beyond that traditional sort of area of where it was in the past, without diluting, of course, the standards.

MR. DENIG: All right. Let's take the lady here in the second row.

QUESTION: I'm with Hong Kong Phoenix Television. Secretary Harrison, in your statement you mentioned an important way of influencing international public opinions, has been for foreign students to come to the United States for their education, then go back to their countries.

But since 9/11, the security measure has led to a significant drop in student visa application, including China. And I'm just wondering, isn't it, this trend countered the program you are running. And my second question is there a specific program currently run in China?

Thank you very much.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HARRISON: Yes, thank you. And this is a serious subject, so I don't want to give you sound bytes. Since September 11th, we did go through a sea-change, and I think it's perfectly understandable with a focus on security. Initially -- I hate to take you all back to that horrible day -- there were people who even questioned why we would bring people from another country into this country to study and to learn.

And that's why it was so important that Muhammed Al-Khalil, who was quoted that day -- I started using his name in every single speech I gave because it is the answer to global terrorism. It is creating mutual respect and understanding. I'm happy to report, though, in the two-year period since September 11th, we have been working on the visa process. We've been -- just as importantly -- working on the security aspect.

We realize now we're at a point where we have to communicate more clearly, and deal with the misconceptions about what it takes to get a visa, how long does it take? Because people who have had, let's say, negative experiences, then tell their friends, and it almost self-selects you out of going to the United States.

There is another reason. This is a \$12 billion industry to this country. We're in competition with many countries for these bright

young people coming to our country, whether it's students or scholars or professors or teachers, we know that this group, they are going to be the opinion leaders down the road.

We want them to come to America, just as Hamid Karzai and Kofi Annan came here, and then took that experience of who we are as a people further and further up the ladder as they achieved. So we have various things that are in place, and I think I'll let -- Stuart, where did you go? If you want to address that our numbers are up, actually, from Asia.

But we're in a competitive stance and I want to make sure that the people who want to come -- and usually these are the people who you want to have come -- get here in the right way. At the same time, we have to make sure they're safe when they come and they're safe when they go home; and so we're trying to balance two things.

Now why are we trying to do that? This is the so-called "gift" we got on September 11th. This is another by-product of terrorism. They don't create anything: culture, education, economics that benefit anyone, so this is what we have been dealing with. And I think working with the Department of Homeland Security and Consular Affairs -- we've made a lot of headway.

Stuart.

MR. PATT: The fact is that -- I think it's really not quite fair to say that the decline in the number of applicants for student visas is totally due to stricter visa application procedures. Almost the day after 9/11 occurred, we saw a precipitous drop in the number of visa applicants in all categories, not just students, all categories. And we really have only gradually begun to recover from that.

The measures you're talking about have gone into effect gradually over the two years since then. And each time we've done something such as maybe requiring a few more personal interviews -- which really doesn't affect China very much because I think most of the students there were being interviewed anyway -- it's really made very little difference in terms of the number of applicants coming in. There are other factors: 9/11, in and of itself, the shock of that maybe caused some people to think about safety and security issues; the economic downturn worldwide after 9/11 has had a great effect; more competition now from other countries that have seen an opportunity to promote themselves more; many factors, of which the visa procedures are only a small part.

But we're working to improve that. We've greatly shortened some of the waiting periods. We're trying to improve administratively. And overall, our goal, still, is to attract as many people who are legitimate travelers, legitimate students -- exchange visitors -- as possible, but we do have an emphasis on our security now. Thank you.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HARRISON: Thank you, Stuart. Do you have another question for Stuart?

QUESTION: Well, I just want to follow-up on that.

MR. DENIG: Sure. We'll go to Said here on the front row.

QUESTION: Hi. My name is Said Arikat, from *Al Quds* newspaper. On the issue of students visas, you said that the numbers were up from Asia, but the numbers are almost half from the Arab countries, from Saudi Arabia, from other places and so on. There's a great deal of discouragement. And furthermore, the students from these countries, they feel being watched, they feel that they are being restricted and so on. When they hear news of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, you know, [com]piling a name or a list or people that participate in demonstrations and so on and students, by their very nature, are very active. So will this -- the Department of Education give recommendations against such activities or such efforts and so on?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HARRISON: All I can tell you is, through our programs, we are reaching out to the Muslim world. And the example of the high school students that I just gave you -- we realized right after September 11th that this was an area that had been neglected. And so for a lot of different reasons, not the least of which are the President's initiatives, and the Middle East Partnership Initiative, through Partnerships for Learning, the need to engage; I mean, this is critically important; and the Secretary of State has also encouraged this.

So we want to reach out to a younger, deeper, wider population. We want people to know who we are, and we want to know who they are beyond the distortion of headlines. So what we are struggling through, and I think, as Stuart said, making a great deal of headway, is in dealing with right now -- and I think Tom Farrell has spoken about this, too -- you have the reality, and we're dealing with that: "How do you get a visa? How do you get here? What will happen here?" But then you have a lot of misconceptions, admittedly with people who came, had a bad experience, perhaps, then they go back, and they, in fact, discourage others from even applying.

So right now, we are trying in the most effective way to communicate, "We want you to come here. We want you to study here. We want your contribution." That's what this country is all about.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, I want to talk about Palestinian students and so on. Most of those kids who are college age, they have been at one time or another in Israeli prisons. They are arrested in their demonstrations. They are picked up from school and so on. And we understand that the Israeli security submit a list to the American consulate and so on of names that are arrested and that actually that is a determining factor in getting a visa. Is that true?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HARRISON: What I will speak to is what our Bureau does, and we have had Palestinians and Israelis, on our exchange programs. Let me get back to the initial premise here, and that is that international education and exchange can really, really be a key element in the fight against global terrorism.

And so through my Bureau, we are trying to reach younger kids so there is more mutual understanding. By the time you get, sometimes, to college age, these ideas are pretty fixated. So we're also bringing over college students, but for the first time we're reaching down to a younger group.

And I have to tell you -- this is probably not a good example -- but it's the one that's foremost in my mind. When these young high schoolers came to this country, before they started getting their assignments to different schools throughout the United States, we had one young woman from Egypt, from Cairo. And I said, "Well, what do you think so far? You know, you've been here ten minutes. What is your opinion of the United States?" And she said, "I have one question. Why do Americans keep asking me what it's like to ride on a camel? I'm from Cairo. I've never been on a camel in my life."

The young man from Tunisia said, "I'm going to Chicago to go to high school and I'm very afraid because of the gang wars you have there every day."

So these are just examples of bright young people getting their information from the headlines, and truly, Americans' misunderstanding about people from the region, and people from the region making up their minds based on movies, culture, other things. We just have to keep doing what we're doing, because to stop doing what we're doing is a horrible alternative.

MR. DENIG: Let's go to Turkey here, on this side.

QUESTION: This is Umit Enginsoy with Turkey's NTV Television. Madame Secretary, two things. First, could you give us some more details about the planned Istanbul Conference: the exact timing, the title, and who is organizing it, et cetera? And secondly, you had some examples where, like, Hamid Karzai, Kofi Annan or Anwar Sadat as people with U.S. scholarships. That's fine. I mean, such people, when they take up major positions in their governments or apparently contribute to better ties with the United States, but in the case of the Turkish bombings, according to Turkish authorities, the suicide bombers came from a Kurdish-populated, heavily Islamist part of the country -- hope was dead in this -- and there are probably thousands of them time -- like time bombs. And how would a few Fulbright scholarships contribute to wiping out such problems as terrorists?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HARRISON: You know, that's a good question. Let me take that first and then talk about the conference.

I can either say that the Fulbright, the Humphrey, the International Student Exchange -- it's only one person. I did use the analogy earlier on the impact -- 7 million people. And they are effective, but it's over time.

The alternative is not to do anything, and the numbers you're talking about then explode exponentially. And that's why we really need, each one of us in our own countries need to be an activist for young people getting the real education they need that prepares them to be contributors of society. If they don't feel they have any other alternative, if they haven't had this from the beginning, then you do have that ticking time bomb.

And I think what we're seeing with the bombings in Turkey and in other places, that it is meant to intimidate people of good will, it's meant to say, "What is the point of a Fulbright?" or, "What is the point of going abroad to study when these bad things are still happening?"

But that's when the call to people of good will has got to be activated. When -- I have to say -- you're all part of the media, but you're all connected to family. You're all human beings. And we all have a responsibility in the job we have to do what we can because we have no other time but now. We can't wait until things are better.

And I have been to Turkey now three times. That may not sound like very much, but in my role as Assistant Secretary I've been to Turkey more than any other country. Why? We wanted to set up university linkages. We wanted to invest in this exchange in terms of Fulbright. And we also wanted to support Turkish men and women.

What this program, Partnerships for Learning, is going to do is bring together business people, people from education in the community, anyone who has a role to play and wants to play in terms of announcing certain things: scholarships for people -- young people who come from schools that have not been focused on before.

So when we go to Turkey, and I'm hopeful that it will be at the beginning of '04, we'll have a lot to announce. I wanted to announce -- let me just say, we're working on a new sister city program that will involve Istanbul. I think that's as far as I can go today. And I will be going to Turkey before January and -- to talk with some of the people there.

QUESTION: Do you know exactly when you'll go?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HARRISON: I don't, because we are working with various people and their schedules, but I hope it's going to be the end of January, first week in February.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HARRISON: No, the conference -- to see if we can pull it together that quickly. It will depend on what the situation is.

MR. DENIG: All right, let's go to Thomas in the first row.

QUESTION: Thomas Gorguissian, An-Nahar, Lebanon. Ms. Secretary, the first question is related to -- it seems that in your speech, your introductory remarks, you stressed about this "traditional elite" and you are trying to reach the younger generation. Is this a kind of shift from what you were trying to do in the last few years? I mean, what I'm looking not a headline, not a sound bite -- understanding.

The second thing, which is, the second question is related to Miss -- Queen Rania's quote, which is "hope gap." If I use the "gap" expression, there is definitely, whether you like to use it or not, misconception or anything else, there is a trust gap, whether you like it or not, whether we like it or not. How you overcome this? I mean, it seems it's, it's not a matter of what you are doing, how you are doing. It's not a matter of statistics, how it's -- the fingerprints or whatever you can call it, in their understanding or misunderstanding of this part of the world.

Part of it, for example, I was surprised that we sort of are talking about international education and its role in fighting terrorism instead of saying, understanding others. Do you have any comment about that?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HARRISON: I do. That's a lot. Let me take the first part. The first part you asked, "Is this a departure from previous years focusing on the younger generation?"

And the answer is, yes, it is, because we have a growing population of, you know, youth under the age of 15, who are not employed or have very little hope of being employed because they're not being educated. And through Partnership for Learning, which is a new initiative from my Bureau, I've been in this position for two years now -- my feeling was that was an area that we had not really focused on, and that it was very, very important to do that.

In terms of the trust gap, you're absolutely right. And we could have called this "Reaching Out for More International Understanding." But if there is more international understanding, that is a key factor in fighting terrorism, so I don't see the disconnect here. I think there's a trust gap. I think there's a "hope gap". I think there are a lot of gaps. And how you close the gap is not by everyone going back into their discrete corners, it's by more exchanges, more opportunities, getting to know one another.

In my role as Assistant Secretary, I try as much as possible when some of these exchange participants are ready to go back to their country, to meet with them, to have lunch, and just say, "Give me your impressions." And it's become such a cliché at this point because I hear from these people, "I came with one idea about who America was, and I'm leaving with another idea."

That doesn't mean they agree with every single thing, but they're shocked to find out how much we volunteer, that we're a faith-based country, but of so many different faiths that we don't talk about it. And through their eyes, I am getting to know my country. Well, it's just as important that Americans go to Lebanon, go to Turkey, go to these other countries, so that they can get rid of their misconceptions. And in that way, you do close that trust gap, and I think also the "hope gap."

Did I forget part 3 or (a)?

QUESTION: No, I -- no, just because I'm trying to understand if you will say the traditional elite and this --

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HARRISON: Yes. Oh, I'm sorry.

QUESTION: I mean, how much is now affecting the budget? I mean 80 percent is traditional elite, or 50 percent, 50 percent?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HARRISON: Okay. That's a good question. I was at a PAO conference in Singapore, and these are all the people in our regional bureau who want to know how our bureau is redirecting resources. And one person got up and said, "Well, wait a minute. If you focus all of this on young people, what happened to the elites and the people that we did reach out to?"

So let me make it clear. We need their help. We need their help helping young people. We don't necessarily need to help them directly as much as, perhaps, we did, but we need them to join us in partnership to identify people outside, perhaps, their original comfort level, to get out to schools maybe and identify those rising stars who are not connected to anybody. And we are having an enormous response to this. Our people in the posts are doing just this.

We have a new program called "Culture Connect." And this involves people -- right now, they're performers -- but they could be from business, and basically, they go to different countries, and they only meet with young people. They don't go to perform. They can do that, but the whole focus -- and they have a track record in this country of working with young people -- is to answer questions.

Now, that would not be enough, because that's almost a performance in itself, so we set up a website. So if you have a young person who is too shy to ask this person, Denise Graves, Mary Wilson, other people, a question, they can get a code, a password, and we have gotten the cooperation of our ambassadors and online they will answer questions -- not only about, "How can I become a world famous opera singer," because that's limited to a very few people.

But, "What would you do if you were here and you were 15 or 16?" And this has been a very successful program. So here we're helping -- we're working with -- let's say, the elites in terms of the cultural ambassadors, many of whom had childhoods that weren't so elite, reaching out to a whole population, a different group of people, who are identifying their counterparts in these countries to talk to American children as well.

MR. DENIG: Good. Let's take the gentleman in the middle.

QUESTION: I am Tae Yong Yoo from MBC, Seoul, Korea. You mentioned that the applicants from Asian countries are actually up.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HARRISON: Korea is up.

QUESTION: Yes, yes. But many people are still wondering whether they can get visa. So just to make it sure, make it clear that America welcomes the foreign students, are you considering any changes to visa requirements for a list for the -- some low-risk countries, significant changes?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HARRISON: I will, you know, I want -- I'm looking here because I want to give this to you, but I'll let Stuart do it. The website, Stuart, that people can tap into now, and any changes --

MR. PATT: www.unitedstatesvisas.gov. There is a new website, www.unitedstatesvisas.gov --

QUESTION: One word?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HARRISON: Which is updated constantly.

MR. PATT: One word: unitedstatesvisas.gov, which has a lot of information about changes in visa process. We try to update it every week, at least with visa news, and explaining how to go through the process of applying and obtaining a visa.

But in direct answer to your question, I would say no, I don't think you should expect that there will be any

significant changes of the type you're suggesting in the near future. For now we are trying to maintain a fairly uniform policy worldwide. We think that's in the best interest of national security. And we -- we'll do our best to make the process as -- move as smoothly and efficiently as possible, but the requirements are basically going to be worldwide.

MR. DENIG: Stuart, perhaps it would be useful also to say that one of the basic goals of the whole visa system it was not originally set up to keep terrorists from coming here, but rather to make sure that people coming here are bona fide visitors and not intending to immigrate. So that's still a basic consideration. So if there's a lot of care given in interviews in a certain country, it's because there's potentially a lot of people in that country who want to immigrate to the United States.

Follow-up?

QUESTION: But it is true that because of the terrorist threat, it has become more difficult to come to U.S. and to study. So if there is some -- there are some low-risk countries, you can certainly give some consideration to those countries, right?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HARRISON: It's like Stuart said.

(Laughter.)

MR. PATT: Well, I'm not so sure that I totally agree with you that it has become that much more difficult for students to apply for a visa now. We really have not changed the requirements for students. They still make the same application. They still have to have an institution of the United States that has accepted them for study. The only difference that would affect students, particularly in Korea, of course, is the requirement for a personal appearance.

But that is just a precursor of the fact that visa applicants are all going to have to come in to our consulates and embassies because we will be taking their photograph, their fingerprint -- electronically, no ink -- as a means of putting a biometric identifier for more security on the visas in the future. That's why you should not expect that just because a country has a good record in terms of return rate that we are going to be able to change some of these procedures.

MR. DENIG: Okay, last question. We'll go back to Turkey.

QUESTION: Yeah, my name is Reha Atasagan. I am with the Turkish Public Television. First of all, first let me thank you for going to Istanbul. I hope you will go, you won't cancel.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HARRISON: I will go. I won't cancel.

QUESTION: And the second thing, you know, the program is Partnership for Learning, so it's partnership, so it's not a one-way track, one-way traffic. And you said that Istanbul, you know, would be the sister city. Correct me if I am wrong, but I'm just wondering, you know, when the State Department is issuing, maybe rightly, warnings to their citizens not to go to Turkey and all that.

And the Turkish -- young Turkish people -- and you're talking about high school students, and with this changing and violence, they might say, you know, "Why should I go to the States?" So I was wondering, in this partnership, if it's a two-way thing, will you also have some high school -- American young people going to, let's say, Turkey or the other programs?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HARRISON: Yes, otherwise, it's not an exchange. And our whole focus --

QUESTION: And what is the ratio will be, or what is the present ratio?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HARRISON: The Partnership -- we had our first high school program to Saudi Arabia last year. And we want to -- and this is not just one-way. When I say reaching younger, I mean Americans as well.

And in terms of going to Turkey, I made a commitment early on. And while it is horrible what these terrorists have done -- but that's the by-product of terrorism, it just undermines the stability of a country, it's designed to intimidate and make people fearful -- and then I think the proper response then is not to throw caution to the winds, but then to go ahead and do what you were going to do anyway.

And so, in the face of all that's happening, it, I think, behooves those of us who are in these positions, to even do more. So you're absolutely right. It isn't just Turkish students coming to the United States. It's Americans. And that's why I started off with the example of these young Hawaiian kids. I mean, they're much too young to go on exchange programs, but they're already being pre-programmed to look at an international environment in a far different way than I did when I was growing up in Brooklyn, New York, and we didn't have any exchange students in our class.

MR. DENIG: Okay. Thank you very much, Madame Secretary. Thank you ladies and gentlemen.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HARRISON: Thank you very much for coming. Thank you.

[End]